



REVISITING THE RELEVANCE OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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General notes on Online Education

The definition of "online education" is the approach to imparting and receiving knowledge through the use of information-communication technology (ICT), as stated by Kearsley (Helmi, 2002, p. 245). Allen and Seaman (2013) termed online course as something that consummates minimum of 80 % of the process operationalizing the course through online.

John F. Kennedy University made the first effort in 1986 to offer an online degree program and was then followed by many academic institutions till now. Such trend accounts for almost 33 percent of the 21 million American online schoolers. For eleven years till the fall semester of 2013, Babson Survey Research Group accounted seven million school admissions for online learning (Lindsay, 2014).

According to Ginn and Hammond, MPA and allied degrees, post-baccalaureate credentials and program of study were not an excused arena being conquered by virtualization of educational landscape. The National Association of Schools and Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) identified that 39 of its affiliate institute offers the said online curricular pursuit in June 2012. From their 96 members, prevalence rate of 40 % and 24 % for hybrid and fully online courses were existing (Ni, 2013, p. 199).

Nursing on the other hand, was found out by the Aslanian Market Research and the Learning House's investigation that Nursing has been the second famously enrolled course for both bachelor and graduate schools in 2015 analysis (Friedman, 2013).

Helmi(2002) identified "*the three main driving forces to the development of online education*", which has presumably caused the above accounts. These are the "information technology", "*education brokers*" and "*market demands*" (p. 243).

Categories of Online Learning

Allen and Seaman cited in 2005 Sloan Consortium report about the academic structures of virtual college. It can be classified into "tradition or minor web-facilitated", "hybrid" and "online" (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). This categorization is based on the percentage of utilizing online technology in delivering instructions and propelling the scholarly interactions among the learners and the instructors.

The first category may be totally free of any online mechanisms or may be done through Blackboard or Web CT as an adjunct to traditional mode of teaching, but only accounting to 29 percent of the lesson substance being delivered using the online machinery (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). Harasim(2000) coined the term "adjunct mode" that pertains to grade-free or unrated class undertakings using online for the purpose of aiding the teaching-learning process (p. 46).

However, the *hybrid category* is dominated by online use, i.e. 30-79 percent of the lessons with some on campus attendance(Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009; Allen & Seaman, 2013, p.11). This means that such mode uses both the classroom and network to sustain its operation. Harasim(2000) mentioned in this category that computer-software-communication technology is used in the program of study such as having "online seminars" and "net-linked classrooms", which defies distance. In this mode, student's engagement in the course is much more markedly observable than in the conventional face-to-face setting, which is more controlled by the instructor. (Harasim, 2000, pp. 46;47).

The last category, *online*, at least 80 percent of the lessons and delivery is facilitated through information and communication technology (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009; Allen & Seaman, 2013, p.11).Harasim (2000) identified the Web as the avenue for the free exchange of knowledge (p 47).

New entities introduced

Harasim presented that virtual learning is a new model for teaching-learning process. As inevitable trend magnetizes the educational directions, new characters in the story of learning process are generated, e.g. "virtual professor" and the "vir-

tual learners".

The "virtual professor" pertains to the learning in the virtual learning mode or in "hybrid class" (which was previously discussed in the previous section). One of the challenges for this new role is to become a learning enabler, not a spoon-feeder. The duty of gathering or rendering helpful information before the class shifts from the student to the teacher as both of them becomes co-partakes in the process. One of the common issue perceived by the online teachers is having a demanding preliminary bulk of task; yet it becomes more manageable to succeeding time the same course is to be rendered (Harasim, 2000, pp. 57;58).

On the other hand, the person engaged and owes compliance to scholastic requirements, completely online or partially, is called the "virtual learner". The personal reason behind subscribing with this form of schooling involves having uncompromised-able duties at home and at work. However, others see that it would serve them a better process and form of learning (Harasim, 2000, pp. 58).

Facts about online education versus stereotypical presuppositions about it Considering online instruction to be substandard compared to the conventional face-to-face mode was found to be an immaterial and unproven argument as revealed by many years of research, that of U.S. Department of Education's included. People were deceived by those who stereotype virtual learning into its "all handiness" to think that it actually is. Actually, it can either be as much as demanding or not. It all boils down on the teacher and panel that appraises it (Lindsay, 2014). Actually, Ni (2013) claimed that in research methodology class, online approach yielded higher fatality than that of face-to-face method (p. 206).

Ni (2013) cited that the value of student performance is not determined by the mode of instruction (p. 205). Therefore, whether online or classroom learning, the success is on both ways.

No significant difference was found on the learning outcome (Lindsay, 2014) specifically "*test scores, assignments, participation grades, and final grades*" (Neuhauser, 2002, p. 99).there was found to be between online and classroom students. The comparative study of Neuhauser (2002) specifically revealed a better performance in terms of tests and final grades for Group Online when compared with Group (Face-to-Face) FTF yet both not that substantially different far from each other at 95 % level of confidence (p. 110).

What employers have to say about online degrees

Not merely about the school from which one graduated and what mode of study has been applied, learning or degree of instruction remains more important and companies have positive feedback about online learning (Friedman, 2013).Haynie (2015) cited that the process/approach to learning can never out-shine the name of the program even for all sub-fields.

On the contrary, Adams and DeFleur (2005) revealed the quantitative findings that 98 % of the employer-respondent would endorse a classroom-bred doctorate degree holder over an online-bred one and 89 % would choose classroom-bred over a hybrid (one with combination of education approach) (p. 78). Their qualitative findings summed up at "*experience*" as their basis. "*Labs, clinics, library work and mentored teaching*" resemble the applied learning experience as important portion of the schooling.

Why prefer online over the classroom

Saad, Busteed and Ogisi(2013) identified the appreciation of Americans about virtual learning in terms of having much "options for curriculum" and "good value for the money". On the other hand, it is thought to render "less rigorous testing and grading, less qualified instructors, and has less credence with employers" unlike the conventional teaching-learning set-up.

"Liking-the-fit experience" as explored by Halter et al. (2006) revealed that online Ph.D. nursing students appreciates this mode as a whole an in terms of their individual choice, daily outlook, the ability to overcome the problem about commuting and long travels and "*having different time zones*" (p. 101-102).

Benefits of online learning

From a consolidated finding of Hackbarth, Harasim, Kiser and Matthews, Ni (2013) enumerated the advantages of online learning as perceived by its advocates. Such were: it induces handiness and reduces obstacle to learning, versatility, having updated substance, adapted learning and responsive learning. This mode shifts the focus and control from the teacher to the learner. It promotes greater involvement of those enrolled students and a more deliberate discussions unlike the usual class configuration (p. 201).

Neuhauser (2002) did not find any difference in the perception of the two sets of learners about "*learning effectiveness*" in a specific subject. The perception about the "*effectiveness of course activities*" does not vary between online and conventional classroom goers, but for pre-test and chapter review in which the first group sees them as "more effective."

Concerns in Online Learning

On the other side of the matter, certain concerns are being perceived in regard to virtual education. Such concerns that agonizes the persons involved in the process were: the teacher and learner's bulk of task, sustaining the engagement of the learners toward the course, hesitation of some participants to integrate themselves in teamwork, and the unresolvable lack of time to get involved despite their eagerness (Mason, 2000, p. 67). Ni (2013) cited in her review of literature from Haythornwaite and colleagues that feeling being remote from the group and becoming more anxious are encountered whenever online learners did not manage to join with the class (p. 201).

Mason (2000) also cited that: the charge for connection, the conditioning the learners and teachers about the "conferencing system", the misdirected sending of messages, and the challenges induced by the estrangement with the system in course of exchanging ideas are previously perceived issues which has been already removed from the picture (p. 67).

On the issue of having a high prevalence of course withdrawal rates among online learners (Ni, 2013, p. 203; Neuhauser, 2002, p. 105). Carl reasoned that as online education is predominated by the older age group, which assumes more family duties and responsibilities (Ni, 2013, p. 203).

Tips for finding a quality online degree

There are many reasons why a student pursues an online degree program. When willingness is there in the student, the remaining negotiation rests on the ability to endure with it. Halter and colleagues (2006) examined "considering the fit" experiences of online Ph.D. students. It mainly reflected that such online approach enabled them to pursue such doctorate degree, which could have been a barrier of pursuit be it in the other/conventional method. Nearness to the program, i.e. being easily at hand with the course, served as a big deciding factor (p. 101).

Zupek (2010) introduced a must-be criteria for someone discerning a field of study via online. The following are the six guide points:

- 1) The school/program being known for having good standing/status is of high priority. One should feel dubious towards a degree program offered by an institution without physical plant and facilities. Otherwise having this creates a good impression that such institution is not a fly-by-night one.
- 2) Third party recognition by known accrediting bodies in education makes a valuable guarantee that both the institution and the degree program is framed to quality standards.
- 3) Since online education involves procedural use of internet and software technology, availability of student support should be present as well as faculty engaged in it.
- 4) A reasonable "student residency" guidelines for completing the academic requirements, apart from having the suspicious short time of finishing the program, warrants the eligibility of it.
- 5) Student fees for enrolment should be the same as that in the on-campus education, which is done on "credit hour computation".
- 6) The volume of academic or course requirements needs to be equally comparable with the regular program.

Coping with the online learning mode

As a new environment and process for learning, online approach poses some challenges to its learners. Halter et al. (2006) cited that it updated the proficiency of its learners in terms of communicating and relating with co-learners and immersing in "online technology". Manifesting one's engagement in the virtual learning environment means encoding and presenting your ideas (p. 102).

Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) the outcomes of online education, which is either a success or a failure. It is considered a success if it fosters equitable chance for education regardless of diversity and uniqueness and the "nature of the subject matter". Furthermore, it further its existence by propagating the expanse of "higher

education teaching by granting visibility to teaching and making it a collegial activity" (p. 597).

On the other hand, it may also fall short if: it becomes a "second class form of education" rather than a new arena for educational undertakings; "technological solutions and pedagogical perspectives" compromised the value of "diversity and variations"; and if it fails to mitigate the "educational deficiencies" rather than enhancing it (Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006, p. 597).

The gist of all this literature points out to the unstoppable emergence of online education, which like the traditional on-campus mode bears both advantages and disadvantages. One thing that remains clear after all the arguments presented about this matter, educational system needs to respond effectively to the challenge of technological bandwagon. Similarly, learners ought to be responsible in making rightful choice about their personal and professional growth.

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